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Editorial

The dynamic nature of social norms: New perspectives on norm development, impact, violation, and enforcement

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ABSTRACT

Social norms are a key feature of human sociality. By clarifying expectations and facilitating coordination, social norms serve as the cornerstones of well-functioning collectives. Reflecting their pivotal role in sustaining the smooth operation of groups and communities, research on social norms in psychology and adjacent disciplines is flourishing. Nevertheless, several critical questions have only recently begun to attract scholarly attention. Here we highlight important new developments in the study of social norms, presenting recent insights into how norms develop in groups; how norms influence affect, perception, and judgment; how people respond to norm violations; and how norms are enforced. We also identify lacunae in the current understanding of social norms, recommending that future research (1) develop a theoretically grounded taxonomy of social norms to facilitate scholarly exchange; (2) further investigate the dynamic unfolding of normative processes over time; (3) expand the scope of investigation by considering the cultural context; and (4) pursue cross-disciplinary integration to enable a more comprehensive understanding and build robust multi-level theory that can account for the effects of norms on individuals, groups, and societies.

1. Introduction

As a profoundly social species, humans spend much of their lives interacting with others. Such interactions pose critical challenges related to cooperation and coordination (Fehr & Gächter, 2002; Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003). To address these challenges, human societies have evolved *social norms* that serve to discourage self-interested actions and to encourage behaviors that are beneficial for social collectives (Bicchieri, 2006; Krebs & Denton, 2005). Social norms can be defined as implicit or explicit rules or principles that are understood by members of a group and that guide and/or constrain behavior without the force of laws to engender proper conduct (Cialdini & Trost, 1998). By creating a shared understanding of what is acceptable and what is not within a particular context, social norms inform behavior and guide social interaction across all types of human collectives, from groups of friends to organizational departments to international politics. Adherence to such norms is a foundation of well-functioning communities and is the glue that keeps society together (Gelfand et al., 2011; Jetten & Hornsey, 2014; Tomasello & Vaish, 2013; Van Kleef, Wanders, Stamkou, & Homan, 2015).

Given the pivotal role social norms play in enabling community functioning, it is important to understand the mechanics of social norms. How do social norms develop? How do they influence people? How do people respond to norm violations? And how are norms enforced? In this special issue, we showcase cutting-edge developments that push the frontiers of research on social norms and deepen understanding of the profoundly social dynamics that govern normative processes. We first provide a short and selective overview of prior work on social norms to illustrate the pervasive impact norms have on our social lives. Next, we introduce the contributions to this special issue,

highlighting some of the key insights they provide. Finally, we call attention to four key challenges for future research that we see as crucial for developing a comprehensive understanding of social norms.

2. Insights into the psychology of social norms

Research on social norms has been conducted in a variety of disciplines, including psychology, sociology, anthropology, philosophy, and behavioral economics. Psychological research, the main focus of this special issue, has demonstrated the powerful influence of social norms on human judgment and behavior. Attunement to social norms becomes manifest at a remarkably early age. Even before infants master formal language, they demonstrate a clear preference for hand puppets that engage in socially normative behavior (e.g., helping other puppets) as compared to puppets that engage in antisocial behavior (Hamlin & Wynn, 2011). By the time they are three years old, children begin to actively berate norm violators (Vaish, Missana, & Tomasello, 2011). Other species such as chimpanzees (Boesch & Tomasello, 1998; Whiten, Horner, & De Waal, 2005), rats (Galef & Whiskin, 2008), and fish (Pike & Laland, 2010) also show evidence of various forms of normative behavior, attesting to the pervasive impact of norms. However, only humans appear to follow norms for social (rather than purely instrumental) reasons (Haun, Rekers, & Tomasello, 2014), for instance to gain acceptance in social groups (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004; Jetten, Hornsey, & Adarves-Yorno, 2006; Steinel et al., 2010).

Classic studies in social psychology revealed that humans abide by social norms even when these run counter to their better judgment (e.g., Asch, 1956; Sherif, 1935). In a seminal illustration of this phenomenon, Asch brought individuals in the laboratory and asked them to judge whether a line was the same length as other lines in a picture.

While the answer was obvious, Asch found that when individuals were in groups where confederates gave the wrong response, three-quarters of participants sided with the group on at least one occasion. Studies such as these illustrate the powerful impact of emerging social norms on human judgment and decision making.

The power of social norms derives from social (or normative) as well as epistemic (or informational) motives (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955). Regarding social motives, research has documented that people follow norms to gain approval (Cialdini & Goldstein, 2004). Accordingly, norm compliance is higher in contexts where reputational concerns and group identity are salient, and in public conditions and densely connected networks where social monitoring is possible (see Jackson & Gelfand, 2017 for a review). Norms also come with epistemic authority, in that they may inform individuals' understanding of the world around them (Deutsch & Gerard, 1955). Accordingly, norms are more likely to influence behavior under conditions of uncertainty (e.g., Abrams & Hogg, 1990; Chiu, Morris, Hong, & Menon, 2000; Pfeffer, Salancik, & Leblebici, 1976).

The literature on social norms features a conceptual distinction between two types of norms that has proven quite generative. Descriptive norms, on the one hand, reflect what most people do in a given setting; injunctive norms, on the other hand, specify what is typically approved in society (Reno, Cialdini, & Kallgren, 1993). Both types of norms have been shown to have considerable sway over individuals' behavior (e.g., Borsari & Carey, 2003; White, Smith, Terry, Greenslade, & McKimmie, 2009), although the effectiveness of persuasive appeals to descriptive and/or injunctive norms depends on the situation (e.g., Schultz, Nolan, Cialdini, Goldstein, & Griskevicius, 2007).

Even though adherence to social norms is adaptive from the point of view of the collective, various individual, situational, and cultural factors may push individuals toward deviance from norms (Jetten & Hornsey, 2014). For example, anti-conformist and deviant behaviors are more common among people with a greater sense of power (Galinsky, Magee, Gruenfeld, Whitson, & Liljenquist, 2008), in situations where accountability is low (Gelfand & Realo, 1999), in cultures that are normatively loose (Gelfand et al., 2011), and in contexts where deviance is normatively prescribed and expected (Hornsey, Jetten, McAuliffe, & Hogg, 2006; McAuliffe, Jetten, Hornsey, & Hogg, 2003).

Given the importance of social norms for the functioning of collectives, it stands to reason that people generally respond negatively when norms are violated. Indeed, ample research has found that people who deviate from group or societal norms often trigger negative emotions (Gutierrez & Giner-Sorolla, 2007; Ohbuchi et al., 2004; Stamkou, Van Kleef, Homan, Gelfand, et al., 2019), gossip (Beersma & Van Kleef, 2012; Peters, Jetten, Radova, & Austin, 2017), and various forms of (social) punishment (Fehr & Fischbacher, 2004; Marques, Abrams, & Serôdio, 2001; Yamagishi, 1986), which may in turn encourage norm abidance. For instance, expressions of anger by fellow group members about deviant opinions may push deviants to conform to the group norm (Heerdink, Van Kleef, Homan, & Fischer, 2013), and gossip motivates group members to adhere to norms of fairness and cooperation (Beersma & Van Kleef, 2011; Feinberg, Willer, & Schultz, 2014).

Despite the importance of norms for social collectives, responses to norm violators are not uniformly negative (Gino, 2018; Jetten & Hornsey, 2014; Van Kleef et al., 2015). One reason is that not all norm violations are disruptive—some have beneficial consequences. For instance, counter-normative behaviors and opinions can benefit group functioning by countering groupthink, sharpening the shared understanding of group norms, and enhancing group cohesion (Peters et al., 2017). Another reason is that responses to norm violations differ depending on the degree to which the observer is personally affected by the violation (Brauer & Chekroun, 2005) and the importance that is attached to norms and norm adherence in a given culture (Gelfand et al., 2011). Accordingly, negative emotional reactions (e.g., moral outrage) to norm violations have been shown to vary as a function of

the cultural context within which the norm violation occurs (Stamkou, Van Kleef, Homan, Gelfand, et al., 2019). Furthermore, in some contexts violating norms may be normatively prescribed, in which case deviance represents an expression of group loyalty (Hornsey & Jetten, 2004).

Indeed, some studies have documented positive responses to norm violations (Van Kleef et al., 2015). One line of research found that bullying behavior in school kids was associated with perceived popularity (Sijtsema, Veenstra, Lindenberg, & Salmivalli, 2009). Other work indicates that norm violators are perceived as powerful (Van Kleef, Homan, Finkenauer, Gündemir, & Stamkou, 2011) and high status (Bellezza, Gino, & Keinan, 2014), and are granted influence when their violations benefit others (i.e., a "Robin Hood effect"; Van Kleef, Homan, Finkenauer, Blaker, & Heerdink, 2012). Furthermore, norm violations may be condoned or even rewarded when norms are relatively unimportant (Brauer & Chekroun; Popa, Phillips, & Robertson, 2014) and their violation is therefore non-threatening, such as in the domain of art (Stamkou, Van Kleef, & Homan, 2018).

This depiction of previous work is necessarily short and selective, but we hope it suffices to illustrate that social norms have a pervasive impact on human judgment and behavior. Although prior research has uncovered important truths about social norms, several questions remain unaddressed, and new questions continue to emerge. This special issue brings together timely new developments in research on social norms, to which we turn now.

3. New developments in research on social norms

In this section we introduce the ten contributions to the current special issue, which cover important new ground in elucidating the social dynamics surrounding the development, impact, violation, and enforcement of social norms.

In analyzing the dynamics of social norms, a logical first question is how norms emerge. Despite the intuitive importance of this question, surprisingly little is known about how norms come to be. Titlestad et al. (this issue) addressed this question by investigating the development of cooperation norms in groups over time. The authors observed considerable differences between groups in emergent cooperation, suggesting that dynamics endogenous to groups (e.g., social interaction) shape the development of social norms. Results further revealed that cooperation was somewhat enhanced by explicit categorization of individuals in groups, whereas cooperation first increased and later decreased in groups where individuals were not explicitly categorized. These findings point to the importance of taking account of the time line of group life, and suggest that the way in which groups are formed affects norm development and norm adherence.

Related to the question of how social norms dynamically develop over time is the question of when norms are internalized by individuals. Scholl et al. (this issue) examined this in the context of university excellence norms for students, which may stimulate performance but can also cause stress and negative affect. In line with recent social cure theorizing (Jetten et al., 2017), Scholl and colleagues show that students who identify strongly with the university are shielded from the negative consequences of excellence norms, and they suggest that this is because highly identified students internalize excellence norms into their self-concept.

Besides affective consequences, social norms can have a strong impact on cognition and behavior, including effects on perception, judgment, and decision making. In particular, as noted above, it has been long established that social norms can influence perceptual judgment (see e.g. Asch, 1956; Sherif, 1935). However, the process by which this happens remains poorly understood. Germar and Mojzisch (this issue) investigated whether social norms influence visual judgment due to a perceptual bias (i.e., altered uptake of sensory information) or a judgmental bias (i.e., a shift in decision criteria). They found that social norms produced a (lasting) perceptual bias toward norm-

congruent sensory information, whereas they produced a (transient) judgmental bias only when they were salient and thus provided an opportunity to maximize social rewards.

Although much research emphasizes the beneficial effects of social norms and norm adherence for collectives (e.g., increased cooperation), norms can also uphold undesirable behaviors. Kraus et al. (this issue) studied the consequences of one such norm by examining how normative expressions of prejudice shape attitudes and behaviors in university communities. To investigate this, the authors focused on the specific example of a university where imagery of the former mascot, a stereotypic depiction of a Native American, remains prevalent despite its official removal in 2007. They found that images of the mascot persist on university apparel, in campus spaces, and in images searched online. Moreover, they found that students low in explicit prejudice toward Native Americans felt lower belonging at the university, and that people who viewed university materials that included images of the mascot donated less money to the university compared to those who did not see depictions of the mascot. These findings illustrate that social norms do not always have beneficial consequences but can also contribute to the maintenance of harmful practices.

As noted above, and fitting with the results of Kraus et al. (this issue), responses to norm violators are not uniformly negative (Van Kleef et al., 2015). This can be explained, at least in part, by the fact that counter-normative behaviors and opinions can be beneficial for group functioning and group decision making (Jetten & Hornsey, 2014). Jans et al. (this issue) approached this idea from a novel angle by investigating whether responses to opinion deviance in groups depend on how group members' social identity was formed. They found that other group members perceived deviants as more valuable to the group when social identity was induced from individual expressions rather than deduced from ingroup similarities. Deviants, in turn, experienced lower belongingness than normative group members, although dynamic tracking over time suggested that deviants began to recover their belongingness in inductively (as opposed to deductively) formed groups. Like the article by Titlestad et al. (this issue), this contribution highlights the importance of the temporal dynamics of deviance in groups.

Responses to norm violations depend not only on group dynamics but are also shaped by individual differences. Stamkou, Van Kleef, and Homan (this issue) investigated how support versus punishment of norm violators is modulated by perceivers' psychological entitlement—a sense of deservingness and expectation of preferential treatment. The results of a series of studies involving a measure and manipulations of entitlement revealed that individuals who felt more entitled were less willing to support norm violators as leaders and were more willing to actively punish them, compared to individuals who felt less entitled. When confronted with norm violators, more strongly entitled participants experienced a greater threat to their own social position, which accounted for their harsher responses to norm violators.

Besides group dynamics and perceiver characteristics, responses to norm violations depend on characteristics of the norm violation itself, such as whether it is perceived as intentional (Bellezza et al., 2014). Someone who unintentionally violates a norm may pose less of a threat to the community than someone who intentionally violates a norm, thereby consciously and deliberately prioritizing their own interests above those of the collective. However, it is not always clear whether a particular norm violation happened intentionally or unintentionally. Hart et al. (this issue) examined whether third-party observers who were aware of the intentional versus unintentional nature of a norm violation involving harm to a target would inform the target about the actor's intentions. Their study revealed that third party observers were more likely to inform victims when harm was accidental than intentional. They further found that third-party behavior was differentially motivated by anger and empathy: Anger toward the offender increased the likelihood that the observer would inform the victim about intentional harm, whereas empathy for the victim increased the likelihood

that the observer would inform the victim about intentional and accidental harm.

It stands to reason that the potentially disruptive effects of norm violations are exacerbated when norm violators gain power and influence, because the actions and decisions of authority figures tend to have considerable sway. Moreover, higher-ranking individuals' norm violations may catalyze norm corrosion, thereby potentially undermining future norm adherence by others as well. It is therefore important to understand how people respond to norm violations of leaders. Besides punishing the norm violator (see Stamkou, Van Kleef, and Homan, this issue), group members may decide to leave the group when their leader violates norms. Ditrich et al. (this issue) investigated whether such leaving intentions can be countered by affirming the group norm in the face of a leader's norm violation. Indeed, they found that norm affirmations dampened group members' leaving intentions after a norm violation by the leader, because norm affirmations reduced the perceived effectiveness of the leader in steering the group in undesired directions. This shows that norm affirmations can protect group coherence in the face of a norm-violating leader.

When we think about norm enforcement, we are likely to think first and foremost about human actors that reward norm abiders or punish norm violators. However, White et al. (this issue) demonstrate that norm enforcement can also happen via supernatural forces. In a series of studies involving anonymous dictator games, they replicated and extended previous findings that thinking about God can decrease selfishness among believers (but not among non-believers) by demonstrating compatible effects for believers in karma. Thinking about karma shifted initially selfish dictator game offers toward fairness (the normatively prosocial response) among karmic believers, but had no effect on already fair offers. The authors conclude that culturally-elaborated beliefs about supernatural justice serve as incentives for believers' adherence to fairness norms.

If social norms are generally beneficial for the functioning of collectives, then people should applaud others who enforce the norms on behalf of the collective. De Kwaadsteniet et al. (this issue) examined what people think of leaders who contribute to the enforcement of norms of cooperation via punishment or reward. Specifically, the authors examined how the strategies leaders use to enforce cooperation norms shape perceptions of their competence, morality, and sociability. Moreover, they investigated whether and how the effects of norm enforcement decisions on leaders' reputations change when leaders are unable to perfectly monitor group members' decisions due to behavioral "noise"—uncertainty regarding the cause of someone's (non-)cooperative behavior. In three experiments, they found that when there was no noise, both reward and punishment as means of enforcing cooperation norms benefited leaders' reputations, especially in terms of competence and morality. When there was noise, however, the use of punishment to enforce norms was viewed more negatively than the use of reward. These findings provide insight into when different types of norm enforcement are supported versus condemned.

4. Conclusions and future challenges

As evidenced in this special issue, social-psychological research on norms is thriving. Novel theoretical angles and innovative empirical approaches are shedding important new light on the individual, group, and societal factors that affect the development, impact, violation, and enforcement of social norms. Drawing on various different theoretical perspectives (e.g., in the realm of social identity, person perception, fairness, culture, religion), papers in this special issue illustrate how individual differences (e.g., identification, entitlement, karmic belief), situational factors (e.g., ambiguity, priming with supernatural forces), and group factors (e.g., nature of social interactions, group norm affirmation, leader's behavior) affect normative behavior. Methodologically, we see a wide range of techniques and procedures being used to understand social norms, ranging from economic games

Table 1
Four limitations of the current state of the art and associated challenges for future research.

Current limitation	Future challenge
Theory development on social norms is impeded by the lack of a broadly shared taxonomy of norm types. This hampers integration of insights from research on different types of norms and stands in the way of a coherent understanding of the operation of social norms.	Develop a theoretically grounded typology or multi-dimensional space of social norms to facilitate scholarly exchange and enhance insight into the differences and similarities between processes associated with different types of norms.
The development of norms over time is poorly understood. How do norms emerge, how do they change over time, and when are they relinquished? The predominant focus on social norms as static phenomena obscures understanding of the dynamic and flexible nature of norms.	Investigate the dynamic unfolding of normative processes over time, including processes that shape norm emergence, norm shifts, and norm abandonment.
Current understanding of the dynamics of social norms is limited by a disproportionate reliance on Western samples.	Investigate the dynamics of social norms across cultures to identify differences and commonalities in the processes involved in norm development, impact, violation, and enforcement across cultural contexts.
Insights from psychological research on norms is insufficiently integrated with insights from other disciplines such as economics, law, political science, sociology, anthropology, and neuroscience. This hampers theoretical integration.	Pursue cross-disciplinary integration to enable a more comprehensive understanding and build robust multi-level theory that can account for the effects of norms on individuals, groups, and societies across domains of life.

to interactive group tasks to large-scale field studies to visual perception tasks. The insights offered by these studies have practical relevance not only for reducing the effects of harmful norms (e.g., prejudice) but also for fostering cooperation and coordination. In all, social-psychological research on norms is making important theoretical, methodological, and practical contributions. We hope future research will build on this momentum by addressing a number of important remaining challenges, which we summarize in Table 1.

First, theory development on social norms is impeded by the lack of a widely accepted, theoretically grounded typology or dimensional model of types of norms. The development of such a taxonomy should be a key priority of future research. For instance, social norms could be categorized as pertaining to the realms of cooperation/fairness, honesty/truthfulness, physical/psychological harm, or decency/respect. Norms may also be categorized in terms of domains of life (e.g., socialization, language/communication, sexuality/gender, food sharing, adornment) that are universal to many, if not all, societies. Alternatively, norms could be organized in a multi-dimensional space defined by, for instance, the (perceived) importance, sharedness, stability, and "location" of norms (e.g., at the local group level or the societal level). Whichever approach proves most fruitful, developing an organizing taxonomy of types of norms promises to enable better comparisons between studies, facilitate scholarly exchange, enhance theoretical integration, and identify qualitative and quantitative differences and similarities in social dynamics between types of norms.

Second, although there is much research on norm abidance and maintenance, relatively little is known about how norms develop, are learned, and change over time. For one, there is a paucity of research on the processes underlying the emergence of social norms. New findings suggest that norms emerge in groups through social interaction (Titlestad et al., this issue), but more work is needed to identify exactly how this happens (e.g., via explicit communication or via subtle nonverbal signals such as emotional expressions in response to norm violations; Giner-Sorolla & Espinosa, 2011; Heerdink et al., in press). Furthermore, it is clear from several contributions to this special issue that responses to norm violations are not always all that negative, which suggests that some norms may be subject to rapid change or even abandonment. More research is needed to enhance insight into the psychological, structural, and cultural factors that precipitate such normative shifts.

Third, many of the findings in this special issue and the literature more generally are derived from Western samples (for exceptions, see Gelfand et al., 2011; Stamkou, Van Kleef, Homan, Gelfand, et al., 2019; White et al., this issue). More cross-cultural research is needed to identify both universal and culture-specific aspects of norm emergence, maintenance, and change, thereby contributing to the development of a truly global science of social norms.

Finally, social-psychological research on norms remains somewhat

isolated from other fields, such as law, political science, sociology, anthropology, and neuroscience (for an exception pertaining to the neurobiology of the detection of norm violations, see Mu, Kitayama, Han, & Gelfand, 2015). We call for better cross-disciplinary integration to enable the development of a more comprehensive, multilevel theory of how individual psychological processes, interactions within social networks, and broader population dynamics interact to shape the development, impact, violation, and enforcement of social norms. Awaiting such research, we conclude that the science of social norms is alive and kicking and holds the key to unlocking solutions to some of society's most pressing issues.

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